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ABSTRACT

This paper provides a detailed overview of the preschool education system in Queensland, Australia, from the perspective of one of the original designers of that program. The first section of the paper describes the social, political and general educational contexts within which the Queensland preschool system was developed. Steps in state level planning for preschool education are discussed. The second section describes two sub-programs of the major, center-based preschool program: the Pre-School Correspondence Program (PSCP) and the Class IV (small rural) School Project (CIV SP). The PSCP, a home-based, parent taught program of multi-format materials, was designed (1) for children in very isolated areas where school enrollment was less than 35 and (2) for children who would receive primary schooling through correspondence only. The CIV SP, a program for schools enrolling a total of 36 to 100 pupils, was conceived as an experiment to create a special grouping of preschool children and primary school students that was under the administrative control of a school principal. The third section summarizes seven major assumptions underlying the development of preschool education, relates four tentative principles for developing preschool programs, and suggests a functional model of program implementation. (Author/RH)

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PRE-SCHOOL EDUCATION IN QUEENSLAND, AUSTRALIA:

A Systems Approach

by Gerald F. Ashby

In this paper I address two major questions. First, what are some of the considerations involved in establishing a pre-school education system? And second, what principles, derived from such an undertaking, may be useful to others in the years ahead? I consider both questions with reference to the State pre-school system in Queensland, Australia. The answers that emerge are the result of my personal experience in the day-to-day planning, implementation and management of the system's development from its inception. While there are obvious dangers in reporting a project in which one has been closely involved, there are also advantages. On the one hand, bias and ego may lead to a confusion of aspiration and achievement, a tendency to paint an over-rosy picture. On the other hand, close involvement in an operation provides a unique lens through which to examine some aspects of early childhood education: the creation of a system from conception to actuality. While I hope to avoid the danger, I also hope that the insights gleaned from the experience may prove helpful.

This paper is divided roughly into three parts. The first section describes the context within which the Queensland pre-school system was developed. The second section introduces two case studies based on sub-programs of the major program: the Pre-School Correspondence Program and the Class IV (small rural) School Project. In the third section I attempt to formulate a theoretical position based on the preceding sections.

At this point it should be noted that I was at the outset, and remain, an early childhood educator (with a background in college teaching) who turned administrator, rather than an educational administrator who became involved in

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early childhood education. I think this distinction is important because of the differences in knowledge and attitudes associated with the two orientations. Undoubtedly, the development of the Queensland system was influenced by certain prior commitments to early childhood education in general, and pre-school education in particular. These have been explored elsewhere (Ashby, 1972). Of course, prolonged involvement in administration tends to generate a certain hard-nosed pragmatism, but one hopes that ideals are never totally submerged.

THE QUEENSLAND CONTEXT

In the course of campaigning towards the State election in 1972, the governing coalition parties announced that if re-elected they would introduce a system of voluntary free pre-school education for all four-year-old children (the year before entry to primary school). While attendance at pre-school would not be compulsory, universal access to such education was a policy objective. Responsibility for implementation was to be vested in the State Department of Education.

Following the re-election of the coalition parties, steps were taken to create a new divisional directorate within the Department of Education to carry responsibility for implementation of the policy. The Government established the general framework for development. First, as far as possible, pre-schools would be located on the grounds of existing primary schools but would operate as part of the pre-school directorate. Second, the standards for facilities and equipment would closely follow the standards set by the Australian Pre-School Association, and buildings would be built to suit pre-school needs. Third, the teaching staff would consist of personnel specifically trained in early childhood education. Fourth, in general, the curriculum would be of an accepted early childhood character and not a downgraded extension of the primary school curriculum. Fifth, attendance would be on a sessional basis, common throughout

Australia, for five half-days each week. Sixth, parent participation and involvement would be encouraged. Seventh, Government assistance to non-Government, community-based pre-schools would continue, even after the introduction of State pre-school facilities.

All of these aspects of the policy represented a major innovation in the field of pre-school education in Australia in the early 1970's. Queensland became the first Australian State to adopt universal access to pre-school education. Further, the decision to establish the pre-school division at the level of a directorate, with senior positions of the same rank and status as existing divisions of the Department, broke a long tradition of locating pre-school education at a fairly low level of administrative responsibility within some other section of the responsible division.

There is no doubt that the policy enunciated in 1972 enjoyed a high level of electoral and general community support. However, the task of developing an overall strategy for implementing the policy was complex. Two matters were of special significance in this regard: the geography and demography of Queensland, and the organization of education within the State.

A brief description of Queensland

Queensland occupies an area of 1.728 million square kilometres (667,000 miles) in northeast Australia (see Figure 1). In comparison with the United States, the area of Queensland is approximately equal to that of Texas, New Mexico, Colorado, Wyoming and Montana, combined. Also, the distance from the northern to the southern border of Queensland is approximately the same as the distance from the Canadian border of the U.S. to the Gulf of Mexico.

(Insert Figure 1 about here)

The population of 2.1 million (less than 1/5 that of Texas) represents approximately 15 percent of the Australian total. The greatest single population concentration is in the southeast corner surrounding Brisbane. Approximately 50 percent of the state's people live in this sector. A further 30 percent live in a string of coastal cities stretching north to Cairns, approximately 1,900 km from Brisbane, and two major inland cities. The distribution of population coupled with the distances between centres in Queensland poses particular difficulties in the provision of services of all kinds.

(Insert Figure 2 about here)

The Queensland Education System

In Australia education is a State responsibility, although in recent years the Commonwealth (Federal) Government has played an important role through the provision of specific purpose funding. The Queensland Department of Education is responsible for the provision of educational facilities and services for some 440,000 students throughout the State. This represents approximately 80 percent of the State's children in the compulsory school attendance age group. The balance are served by non-Government schools, of which the Catholic system is the most significant component.

The Department employs some 21,000 full-time teachers and a number of others on a part-time basis. Two other groups assist directly in providing

educational services to schools. The first consists of a range of professional personnel such as psychologists, therapists, media specialists and other professionals who provide specialist services. The second group consists of ancillary staff such as clerical personnel, laboratory attendants, teacher aides, grounds-men, janitors and cleaning staff.

Control of all functions is vested in the permanent head of the Department, the Director-General of Education, who is directly responsible to the Minister for Education. The former is a permanently tenured public servant (as are all officers, including teachers, in the Department), while the latter is a Member of Parliament, from the ranks of the governing political party. The Director-General is assisted by an immediate senior staff, including Directors of Divisions and a team of Regional Directors. Directors are responsible for various school sectors (e.g., preschool) while Regional Directors have responsibility for all schools and operations within particular geographic areas (see Figure 2).

Visitors to Australia often comment (and frequently unfavorably) on the extent of Government centralization in education and other areas of administration. In part centralized control is a product of the history of settlement of Australia. However, and more importantly, centralization represents an attempt to achieve degrees of equality in the provision of facilities and services across very large geographic areas. Planning and decision making must take State-wide considerations into account and ensure that very small and isolated communities are not disadvantaged in comparison with more populous areas. Further, it should not be imagined that centralized control of policy planning and provision intrudes into the day to day functioning of schools. Substantial and balancing degrees of autonomy exist (and indeed must exist) within an organization such as the Queensland Department of Education.

Figure 3 depicts, in simple form, the structure of the school system within Queensland. Variations both in structure of and in age levels for progressing through school systems exist between States and these have posed intractable problems over many years. Compulsory schooling in Queensland is from six to fifteen years of age. However, most children enter Year 1 of primary schooling before they turn six. It should be noted that there is only one date for initial entry into school: at the beginning of the school year, in late January. Pre-schools cater to children in the year before entry into Year 1.

(Insert Figure 3 about here)

Queensland primary schools are classified in accordance with size. The number of pupils determines the distribution of resources and the type of staffing provided. Table 1 sets out the classes of regular primary schools within the education system. In addition to these schools there is a whole range of other facilities for children with special educational needs, including the handicapped and more particularly, geographically isolated children. The latter group are assisted by means of a central correspondence school, located in Brisbane, which provides a full range of primary education. There are also a number of "Schools of the Air" which provide supplementary instruction to pupils on primary correspondence courses.

(Insert Table 1 about here)

There are four main types of pre-school facilities being developed by the Department of Education. Three types of facilities are designed to serve different sized groups of children on a sessional basis. The fourth type of facility is designed specifically to cater to particular groups of children having some particular need.

- (a) **Standard Unit:** This is a facility designed for a total of 50 children enrolled on a sessional attendance basis. In general a child attends 5 half-days per week and two groups of 25 make up the total enrollment. Staffing for this unit consists of one teacher and a teacher's aide.
- (b) **Reduced Unit:** This is a facility designed for areas where the eligible pre-school aged population is significantly less than 50 children, and likely to remain so. On average, reduced units are designed for total enrollments between 20-35 children. Depending on the sessional attendance pattern adopted in a particular center, which might include half day or full day attendance, the staffing consists of a teacher and, where necessary, a teacher's aide.
- (c) **Special Units:** These units are designed to serve the needs of particular groups of children (e.g., deaf, cerebral palsied, etc.). Each such unit incorporates features required for work with the particular group being served. As a general principle special units are built in association with preschool units enrolling non-handicapped children to enable integration of the handicapped child into a regular group to occur. As these units may cater to children below 4 years of age the enrollment is flexible, but groups are kept to the smallest possible size. Staffing is dependent upon the numbers of children enrolled. The optimum adult/child ratio is approximately 1:4-5. This consists of a mixture of teachers, specialist consultants and therapists and teacher's aides.

- (d) **Multiple Units:** Multiple units providing facilities equivalent of up to 3 standard units may be established on the one site. In certain circumstances a special unit might be added to this maximum. Where the need of an area is greater than that provided by 3 standard units, excluding a special unit, (say 5 groups of 25 children = 150 total enrollment) additional facilities are established on separate sites. Staffing for each unit is one teacher and a teacher's aide.

Foundations of the Pre-School System

At the time of the Government decision to provide pre-school education, the eligible population of 4-5 year old children was estimated as 42,000. Of these, there were an estimated 8,500 children aged 4-5 years attending community pre-schools operated by various voluntary groups. The majority of existing pre-school facilities were in urban areas with very few in small rural centres. Furthermore, within the urban areas there were disparities in the distribution of facilities. In general, because the voluntary organizations charged fees to supplement State Government subsidies and had to raise considerable sums of money in order to acquire premises, availability tended to be restricted to more affluent communities.

Almost inevitably, a conflict emerged. While voluntary organizations welcomed the Government's policy, they argued that it should be implemented in communities other than those where voluntary preschools existed. Conversely, parents within communities served by voluntary preschools did not want to be deprived of access to State provided pre-schools. The resolution of this conflict was achieved through the development of effective communication and collaboration between the Department and the voluntary organizations - something that took time.

As was indicated, implementing the Government's policy presented a number of immediate problems. These included:

welding a new element into a large beaurcratic organization with its established procedures and networks;

determining a basis for establishing pre-school facilities throughout the State;

establishing building design and equipment standards;

establishing cost projections and methods of monitoring costs;

establishing staff training programs;

matching staffing programs to construction programs

formulating and disseminating the educational objectives of the pre-school education system;

securing and maintaining public acceptance of and interest in pre-school education;

developing appropriate administrative procedures for the conduct of pre-schools, the enrollment of children and such matters;

establishing necessary support networks for teachers, parents and children;

devising and providing appropriate curriculum resources;

establishing co-operative relationships with existing pre-school services;

ensuring cooperation from local school administrators.

Most of the immediate matters were overlaid by the pragmatic need to work towards speedy implementation of the election promise. It should be kept in mind that no data base existed concerning the setting up of a comprehensive pre-school system within Australia. Such literature as was available was inappropriate in terms of either the assumptions involved or the context within which the system was to operate. Indeed, there was an absence of policy-orientated literature concerning early childhood education, and this influenced the adoption of a "formative" approach to planning and development. A fundamental principle that permeated all decisions was retention of maximum flexibility in determining both ends and means.

The Government sought quick and visible outcomes resulting from its policy. This both simplified and complicated matters. On the one hand, it facilitated such matters as site acquisition, design and construction timetables, staff build-up and materials procurement. Strong Governmental support also ensured maximum co-operation from both the Department of Education and other State Departments. However, great care had to be taken so that plans did not close off future options for delivering services or indeed, wholly preempt the

type of service offered. This necessitated a broad conceptualization concerning the type of system (albeit flexible and responsive to change) to be established.

There was an acute awareness that if things were not done right first time around, there might never be another opportunity. It is possible to build on success but failure seldom provides second chances.

Thus, beyond the immediate, practical concerns, a number of much broader issues emerged. These included:

establishing strategies for ensuring continuity
between pre-school and initial primary school programs;

articulating the administrative and professional relationships
between pre-school and primary school personnel;

creating provisions for children for whom conventional types of
Australian pre-schools were not a viable consideration;

ensuring a smooth transition from the anticipated period of
development of the system into a more stable, operational mode;

providing avenues for professional development of personnel and
for career satisfaction;

instituting mechanisms for the maintenance of motivation among
teaching staff and providing for their input into the system;

developing communication networks between personnel, other elements in the Department of Education, and other agencies;

initiating formal inter-agency mechanisms for the provision of particular services such as health and psychological services;

ensuring adequate and appropriate special provisions for particular groups of children such as the physically, sensorially, and intellectually handicapped;

ensuring adequate opportunities for parent and community input into the education process.

Thus, aspects of short-term and long-term planning had to be collapsed in ways that retained flexibility in terms of future development, and also ensured that quality was provided in the immediate context. Two early decisions, both of which illustrate the character of the planning, highlight the point.

The first example relates to a particular strategy for getting underway. Because of the distribution of population throughout the State it was accepted that in certain cases, both the facilities and the types of services provided would have to be radically different from those generally available within Australia.

This decision had a number of outcomes, two of which may be noted. First, it led to the creation of a portfolio of standard pre-school designs intended to satisfy a wide range of community and environmental situations.

The basic planning module was a "standard unit." A standard unit consisted of a facility designed to accommodate 25 children per session, there being two sessions conducted in each unit daily. Staffing of a standard unit was one teacher and a teacher aide, plus voluntary helpers.

All architectural plans for both indoor and outdoor areas were developed around the standard unit module. Further, units could be aggregated to form multi-unit centers or reduced in area to serve lesser numbers of children. Standard designs could also be modified in terms of internal layout, but contained within the standard shell, in order to create specialized facilities for children with special educational and other needs. Finally, the issue of furniture, equipment (both indoor and outdoor), consumable and other materials developed around the standard unit. An immediate consequence was the increased capacity that this approach provided for monitoring and projecting costs as information could be refined in an almost infinite number of ways.

A second outcome of the decision to focus initially on conventional pre-school facilities was that it provided lead-time necessary to assemble data to assist in deciding what to do in areas served by small Class III and Class IV, V and VI schools. In this regard, the search was for alternative modes of service delivery which would be consistent with the general philosophy of the evolving system. Two quite different approaches were developed. These were the Pre-School Correspondence Program and the Class IV School Project, both of which will be considered in more detail later.

The second example related to the decision to opt for what has come to be called a "flat" administrative structure. This approach was recognized as somewhat radical within a hierarchical bureaucratic organization, such as the Department of Education. The tradition of the "line and staff" pyramid was

well established. However, a distinction was drawn between authority and responsibility. Although the delegation of authority, that is the formal process of distributing decision making and advisory functions within the hierarchy, was accepted, it was also believed that the shaping of advice provided opportunities for wide ranging participation in the decision-making process. That is, that the individual teacher should enjoy the widest measure of professional autonomy consistent with the maintenance of the organization. Further, that it was important to distinguish between those areas of policy which the teacher was expected to implement and those areas where choice was vested in the teacher. Many implications flowed from emphasis upon the professional autonomy of the teacher. For example, the type of support services provided to teachers very clearly involved careful consideration. A peer-level advisory support system was opted for rather than the more conventional notion of a supervisory team. Thus, for example, advisory personnel were drawn from the ranks of teachers and returned to teaching after a fixed period of time. Advisers were teachers who could advise, assist, counsel, console and even criticize, but always as peers. However, they could not demand or order and, more important, they did not form a supervisory cadre, which might become a self-interest group. A further implication was the fostering of a professional-colleague relationship between the pre-school teacher and the principal and staff of the associated primary school. The possibility of the pre-school being administratively the responsibility of the primary school principal was avoided. Although it was appreciated that many pre-school teachers would be young and lack experience, it was believed that locking the pre-school into the primary school might stifle growth and initiative. Further, administrative union could be effected at any future time, but, once done, would be difficult to undo if found inappropriate.

These two examples are not definitive in terms of spelling out all the implications that flowed from the decisions, nor are they representative of all of the decisions that were made. Suffice it to say, at this juncture, there was a firm belief that if early childhood education principles were to penetrate the education system of Queensland, they required careful nurture and the optimum opportunity to demonstrate their potential for influencing, from below, practice of the primary school.

Perhaps the most significant set of early decisions revolves around the question of objectives. There is a seductive simplicity in stating system-wide objectives, including the idea of minimum competencies. These can comfort administrators by providing immediate answers to critics. Indeed, system-wide objectives may even be adopted by teachers for translation into programs! However, there is little point in proposing that the individual teacher should enjoy a wide measure of professional autonomy and then proceeding to spell out, in detail, what constitutes acceptable exercise of such autonomy. Further, it was firmly believed that there was not much merit in proposing that all pre-schools should be the same or follow the same curriculum. Rather, it was maintained that better results might be achieved by helping teachers to develop the kind of program best suited to their particular groups of children and communities.

However, there was a clear need to state publicly what the pre-school system was about, and therefore a set of four statements was developed. These statements, describing the functions of a pre-school rather than the objectives of pre-school education are as follows:

- . To provide a bridge by which the young child can be assisted to make a transition from home to school;
- . to encourage parent interest and participation in the early education process;
- . To promote the physical and mental health of the young child;
- . To develop those abilities, skills and attitudes which will aid the educational progress of the young child.

The shift in emphasis from objectives to functions may appear subtle, but it represented a significant trend away from the kinds of approaches which had dominated Australian pre-school education for many years. In general, statements of objectives concerning pre-school education consisted of beliefs about the nature of child development and the conditions necessary for optimum development. While such statements are influential in developing educational programs, it is important to distinguish between the program and the organization (or institution) sponsoring the program: the purposes of the latter may be different from the former. Emphasis on functions was also a break with the Australian primary education tradition, which had been dominated by the prescribed syllabus for almost a century.

The basis and intent of each function was identified and elaborated upon in terms of conditions to be met by educational programs in Queensland State

pre-schools. These conditions spelled out the broad thrust of the system. Thus, for example, the first function analyzed the mediating and socializing role of the pre-school. The pre-school was viewed as an aid to children (and their parents) in moving from one powerful socializing agent, the home, to another, the school. As a result the pre-school was concerned with building upon and extending home learning, while at the same time gradually shifting the focus towards the styles of learning and experiencing promoted in the early years of primary schooling.

The statement of functions, and the elaboration, were widely promulgated both in the Education Department and in the general community. Because each function was capable of treatment at a variety of levels, the statement was perceived as the "philosophy" of the pre-school system. Further, the statement of functions proved a major resource for teachers and others when explaining the pre-school to the community and to colleagues from other levels of education. It had the prime virtue of simplicity. Thus, although a wide variety of programs were adopted by teachers, efforts were consistently made to use the statement of functions as a pivot around which the programs evolved. The outcome was that throughout the State, teachers presented a unified approach to colleagues in primary and secondary schools who were often skeptical--something that surprised many observers who anticipated that pre-school education would be purely "play and happiness." Further, in subsequent years when more detailed analyses of curricula were undertaken, these functions still played a significant role in shaping the kinds of statements which emerged [Halliwell, 1977 (a), 1977 (b)].

(Insert Table 2 about here)

The growth of the pre-school system was rapid. Table 2 indicates the growth of the centre-based program between 1972, when the policy was announced, and 1979. Such bald statistics do not indicate some of the novel areas that opened up for pre-school teachers: advisory work throughout the State, work in hospitals, media production, theatre-in-education, special education, research and curriculum development activities, as well as the two sub-programs, discussed in the next section. In addition, the geographic distribution of pre-school facilities across the State presented to teachers ranges of community settings and lifestyles which were novel in terms of the Australian experience in pre-school education, and this forced some reformulation of many long cherished ideas about what constituted a "proper" program for young children.

CASE STUDIES OF TWO SUB-PROGRAMS

The centre-based program was designed to provide access to pre-school facilities for the majority of young children throughout the State. However, special approaches were needed to provide pre-schooling for children in the many small schools and in the Primary Correspondence School. (The latter had existed for some 50 years and in the early 1970's offered full primary education to approximately 1,600 children each year.)

The first special program was the Pre-School Correspondence Program, introduced in 1974. This was designed for children in areas served by Class V and VI schools (enrollment less than 35), and those who would normally enroll for primary schooling with the Primary Correspondence School. The second program was the Class IV (Early Education Class) School project which was introduced in 1976.

Pre-School Correspondence Program

The Pre-School Correspondence Program (P.S.C.P.) was developed to cater to those children whose families lived in very isolated parts of the State. Such children were typically envisaged as progressing into primary schooling by way of the Primary Correspondence School or by way of very small one-teacher schools which had a total enrollment across all grades of fewer than 20 pupils. It was estimated that up to 1,000 children might be eligible for this program. However, because of poor communications in the outback, it was understood that not all parents would participate.

Essentially the P.S.C.P. was conceived as a home-based, parent taught program consisting of multi-format materials, packaged and delivered by regular mail services and supported by a team of teachers based at the unity headquarters in Brisbane. However, when the idea was first developed in 1973, only scant information was available to guide the construction of such a program. Furthermore, although primary and secondary correspondence schools had existed for many years in all Australian States, and in New Zealand, there had been virtually no rigorous evaluation of the processes involved in designing and delivering such programs. Therefore, a conscious decision was made to adopt a formative development and evaluation approach to the P.S.C.P. This strategy permitted materials and processes to be tested while at the same time providing at least a minimal level of service. A fundamental concern of the planners was the retention of maximum flexibility within a functional structure which would permit both ends and means to be varied in accordance with experience and data.

A set of key statements was developed to describe the proposed program. The statements combined both intentions and aspirations and provided a basis

for the development of materials, process, resources and organization. Although the original set of statements has undergone many changes as a result of experience and increased knowledge and sophistication, the spirit of the original set has been retained. The program proposals were as follows:

1. To construct a home-based, early childhood education program, taking into account the variability of geographic and environmental settings and the special needs of the children and the families who would participate in the program.
2. To provide for the cognitive, affective, psycho-motor and (in so far as is possible) social development of children consisting of learning experiences in the following areas:
 - Language arts and associated skills, including auditory and perceptual skills;
 - appropriate concepts and skills from mathematics and the physical and social sciences, including the development of relevant problem solving and inquiry skills;
 - motor skill development and coordination at both the fine and gross levels;
 - imaginative thinking and creative expression through music, movement, dance and various art media.

3. To ensure that both the materials and the guidance given to parents in their use, reflected the principle of learning proceeding on the basis of the child's active involvement with people, objects and events in the everyday environment, and interaction on a "one-to-one" basis with the "parent-teacher."
4. To support parents positively in the role of both teacher and parent and, in particular, to promote the acquisition of skills and techniques that facilitate the child's acquisition of a positive self-image, self reliance in learning and a sense of growing competence.
5. To maximize, to the extent possible within a correspondence-style program, direct, warm and positive communication between "unit-based" teachers, "parent-teachers" and children as a basis for individualizing the "core " program to meet particular family circumstances.
6. To ensure that the role of the teacher both in the "unit-based" and home situations is defined as "active" and "supportive": That the initiation of action through suggestion, instruction and reinforcement and the sustaining of learning through warm interactions are treated equally.

7. To establish such support services as might be required to supplement the "core" educational program.
8. To provide such opportunity for peer group socialization as might be possible within the limitations of family circumstance and opportunity.
9. To endeavor to provide a smooth transition from the pre-school program to primary schooling, whether this be by correspondence or attendance.

Using this framework as a basis, a program entitled "The Child and His World" was created. The program was to cater to the pre-school child within the setting of rural Queensland. The program sequence, as illustrated in Figure 4, contained eight major units or segments. Each segment covered areas through which basic attitudes, concepts and skills, important for both present and later learning, could be developed. Segments constituted a standard package, the "core," which went to each participant. Variation was introduced by the child's unit-based teacher in consultation with the parent teacher. Each segment contained two types of material: constant objectives and changing contents. The constants included matters such as promoting language skills, eliciting and using information, promoting and sustaining interests in and utilizing the resources of the home environment. The materials explored new content throughout each segment which was related to the particular theme.

(Insert Figure 4 about here)

In each segment the theme is broken down into concepts and subconcepts. For example, Segment 2, Daily Living, includes the concepts My Family, The House Where I Live and My Day. Each of these is further subdivided. The House Where I Live explores such things as types of homes, places where homes are situated, inside homes, and what happens in different parts of the home. Various games and activities are suggested under each sub-concept. These include stories, poems, songs, puppet plays, indoor and outdoor activities and creative activities. At the same time reference is made to earlier work for reinforcement.

Segments are designed to cover activities for a specified number of weeks and are dispatched each 4-6 weeks. Each package consists of story booklets, concept builders, activities and games, language experiences, cassette tapes and a magazine for parents entitled Contact. Feedback forms prepared by the unit-based teachers are completed by parents and serve to indicate the level of the child's activity in the various learning areas as well as parent reactions to materials. In addition to this type of feedback, parents are also encouraged to submit samples of children's work (e.g. art work, collections, "stories," etc.), to make cassette tapes incorporating conversation with the child, and so on. These materials assist the unit-based teacher to obtain a more rounded picture of the child and of the family.

Cassette tapes included as part of the basic content of each segment contain stories, language exercise and lessons in creative movement, song and dance. These are designed to reinforce the concepts presented in written form. A basic equipment kit consisting of supplies of paints, crayons, books and other materials is also provided to each child at the beginning of the school year.

A Resource Book for Parents, which is issued to all parents, further aids in extending and enriching the segment materials and provides ideas and suggestions for using equipment and junk materials available around the home. This book refers to materials for use in play, both indoors and outdoors, and assists parents in establishing interesting, attractive and inexpensive play areas.

Each segment of the program provides a general base from which to work. Concepts and learning goals are identified, suggestions for ways of proceeding and supporting materials are also presented. In addition, an especially vital ingredient is the input from the unit-based teacher. The quality of the communication among teachers, parents and children is the most critical process involved in the P.S.C.P.

On enrollment each child is assigned to a unit-based teacher who works with the family for the year. Each teacher is responsible for approximately 30 families. Families are grouped on a geographic basis in order to facilitate teacher visits and to enable the teacher to gain a more intimate knowledge of the area. It is the role of the teacher to individualize the "core" program for each child by shifting a focus, providing supplementary materials, and providing guidance to the parent-teacher in the home situation. Naturally, this process assumes a close communication network between teacher, parent and child.

Teacher, parents and children exchange letters and cassette tapes and it is the teacher's role to meet parent requests for advice and to provide ideas on how to proceed. In this regard, teachers are able to draw upon a wide range of supplementary resources which can be used to augment the "core" program for an individual child. These resources also include a substantial collection of materials for parents.

All unit-based teachers spend some time out in the field visiting the children and parents for whom they are responsible. Generally teachers visit the home and in many instances will stay overnight with the family. In addition, wherever possible teachers conduct small group workshops for parents and children. These may last from a half day to a full day depending on circumstances. Parents and children also visit the Pre-school Correspondence Unit when they come to the city. Finally, unit-based teachers act as facilitators by putting parents in touch with one another and assisting them to utilize other support personnel and resources.

In the P.S.C.P., emphasis is placed on providing the child with as much opportunity as possible for learning through "play" situations. Parents are encouraged to provide an interesting environment which allows the child the opportunity to discover, explore, create and experiment through active involvement with concrete materials. The program continually emphasizes that learning occurs through the day to day experiences of the child and is not limited to specific times set aside in the "schoolroom." (Many parents who act as home supervisors on primary correspondence programs have a particular area set aside in the home for school lessons. Hence the term "schoolroom.")

Parents are encouraged to work with their children when and where they are able, in their own way and according to their commitments. Many families living on cattle or sheep properties are very dependent on the "family work force" to share the responsibilities in the running of the property. Obviously, the role of the parent-teacher must be tailored to fit the family needs.

(Insert Table 3 about here)

The growth of the P.S.C.P. since 1974 is set out in Table 3.

An Outreach of the P.S.C.P.: SPAN

It was recognized from the beginning that the P.S.C.P. could do little to serve the young child's need to interact with age-mates. Further, it was acknowledged that many children in geographically isolated areas often have only limited opportunities for such interaction. It was decided to explore ways of meeting this problem. SPAN* groups were the outcome.

These groups were conceived as parent-run playgroups which would meet as frequently as the participants wished. Unit-based teachers took the initiative in proposing membership to parents, but the major decisions were made by parents themselves. Parents organized meeting places and determined their own procedures. However, the Pre-school Correspondence Unit provided a range of support materials, including information booklets and cassette tapes. In addition, each group received an equipment kit which consisted of basic play and other materials for children. A newsletter was also regularly distributed to groups.

Each year the Pre-School Correspondence Unit organizes a series of workshops for parents. These are conducted in a number of provincial cities. Attendance is open to all parents who are interested in forming SPAN groups. Assistance is provided for both travel and accommodations. Workshops usually last about three days. They are designed to introduce parents to ways of providing activities and experiences for young children in small group situations. Participation in discussions, practical activities, and observations of children in a playgroup setting form the core elements of the workshops.

*SPAN refers to the distances to be spanned by any social group in the Queensland outback.

Communication and support services to SPAN groups involve a three-way process linking SPAN to the Correspondence Unit and with pre-school advisory teachers who operate within the various Education Regions of the State. This last Linkage is important. While there is a close relationship between SPAN groups and the Pre-School Correspondence Unit it is important for parents to have the assistance of teachers who are regionally based and can offer on the spot support.

The growth of SPAN groups has been remarkable. In 1975, some 10 groups were in operation. By the end of 1978 there were almost 90. However, a most significant development is the extent to which parents whose children are not yet eligible for the P.S.C.P. have come to be involved in SPAN. It is evident that through the use of appropriate resources, such as materials, support and training experience, parents have gained confidence and skill in developing valuable experiences for both themselves and their children. There is also evidence to suggest that the benefits of such experience are by no means restricted to SPAN participants but infuse many segments of rural community life in outback Queensland.

P.S.C.P./SPAN Research Project

Since 1975 a major research project, of a formative kind, has been conducted in connection with the P.S.C.P. and SPAN Groups. This study initially formed part of a two year international program monitored by the Centre for Educational Research and Innovation (C.E.R.I.) of the Organization for Economic Co-Ordination and Development (O.E.C.D.). The project was planned to elicit a wide range of information on various aspects of program design, delivery and organization. The research was based on the assumption that flexibility of both

ends and means was an important characteristic of a responsive and sensitive organization. A number of key generalizations have emerged to date.

First, within a home-based approach to pre-school education, it is absolutely essential that close attention be paid to the interaction among the major elements involved in the network. Such an observation may appear trite and self-evident, yet it is very important. In the P.S.C.P. the prime elements are the unit-based teachers, the parents, the children and the program materials. Careful analysis revealed that impediments to communication existed at all levels of operation: materials were often not clear to parents; frequently too many ideas were presented, so parents felt overwhelmed; teachers often responded too slowly to parent's requests for help; help was not of the kind actually sought; parents were often unable to express their concerns or satisfactions, and therefore deprived teachers of feelings of job satisfaction.

It is essential to remedy such communication problems as quickly as possible. It may be helpful to see how this was accomplished when it was discovered, in an early study, that teachers were taking so long to respond to parents' communications. Often several weeks elapsed before a response went back to a parent. A number of matters were involved: teachers were almost too diligent in attempting to gather or devise resources to assist the parent; communication was written (because the research design required records of communication); resources were not indexed in ways that permitted teachers to easily access relevant materials; and mail distributions and time-lines were inadequately understood by clerical staff in the Pre-School Correspondence Unit. Reorganization of the Library, instigation of procedures for heightening sensitivity to parents' requests, the use of audio cassettes and other changes were introduced so that when the matter was reinvestigated later, the focus had shifted away from time elements to the more qualitative issues of tailoring information more accurately to suit the family situation and the teaching abilities of the mother.

Second, organization of the content of the educational program to be implemented in the home situation is less critical than initially believed. Shaping the program to meet the needs of the child, the parent and the family situation is the critical factor. That is, no matter how superior the educational package, it will not be effective unless there is individualized monitoring, the selection of those materials and additional resources most relevant to each family.

Very early in the research project it became quite obvious to the research team that while the materials that constituted the P.S.C.P. could be improved, and indeed had to be redeveloped, concentration on the content of the materials would not produce the most satisfactory improvements in the program's quality. Indeed, it was tempting, initially, to consider a series of empirical studies to yield information on the abilities of children and parents, and adopt a "deficit - strength" model for developing materials. However, it was also apparent that because of the tremendous spread of background variables, including parental education variables, it would be more productive to concentrate on the processes of communication between teachers and parents, teachers and children, parents and teachers and children and teachers, so that each could better provide useful feedback to the other. The concentration of the research upon processes has permitted the development of strategies for improving the quality of the educational experiences much more directly than attempts to devise the "ideal" package might have achieved.

Third, home-based pre-school programs can have the same range of spin-offs as more conventional centre-based programs. This is a perception and judgment rather than an empirical observation. The data indicate that both parents and children grow in a whole range of ways and that a number of qualitative changes occur within the family when the program attempts to meet the family's perceived needs, rather than focus on needs which are external.

However, home-based pre-school education is not a cheap alternative. Costing studies indicate that it costs about the same amount per child to deliver a home-based as a centre-based program; the only significant savings is in capital investment.

Fourth, unit-based teachers in the P.S.C.P. have the same needs for professional enhancement and support as teachers in conventional pre-school units. Because the unit-based teachers operated in an office-type setting surrounded by many other teachers it was initially believed that professional stimulation would present few problems. However, investigation revealed that this was not so. Maintenance of motivation depended on feedback and job satisfaction. Teachers' prime sources of satisfaction came from children and parents. Thus, it was found essential to recognize the autonomy of the unit-based teachers by providing similar opportunities to interact directly with the children and parents in their groups and individualize the standard "core" program. Further, it was shown that one element in enhancement was the opportunity to engage in increasingly more sophisticated ways of implementing the program. Thus, it is always necessary to explore ways of ensuring that teachers can experience satisfaction through job enrichment, no matter what the setting in which the teacher operates.

Class IV School Project: Early Education Classes

It was noted previously that areas served by Class IV schools presented a particular problem with regard to the provision of pre-school education. Class IV primary schools have enrollments of between 36 and 100 pupils. Thus, the annual pupil intake into the first year of primary schooling could vary between, say, 5 and 15 pupils. And although these schools represented just over 25

percent (258 schools) of all primary schools operated by the Department of Education they enrolled only 6.5 percent (14,300) of all pupils. Analyses indicated that the catchment areas served by Class IV schools contained approximately 2,500 children who would be eligible for pre-school annually.

Clearly, providing conventional pre-school facilities of the unit type was not viable. The limited population in catchment areas reflected in the small numbers of children attending this group of schools made such provision impractical. Other options had to be considered. One was the possibility of establishing mobile pre-schools which could visit areas on an itinerant basis. However, the distribution of Class IV schools and the distances between them indicated that this proposition would not offer an effective solution except in a minority of cases. Another option was to permit all children who would attend a Class IV school to be eligible to enroll with the P.S.C.P. This was considered undesirable because of the consequences for the size of the Pre-School Correspondence Unit. With a potential enrollment of 3,500, it was believed that formalization of the management of the unit and loss of flexibility of the desired organizational structure were inevitable. Furthermore, it was believed that results might be better if a more direct input was made into the schools and their communities. A major element in the thinking about pre-school provisions across the State was the conviction that through sensitive interaction among teachers, children and parents it was possible to raise educational expectations and exercise influence upon both homes and primary schools. Thus, it was decided to attempt an experiment: To create within Class IV schools a special grouping of pre-school children and those in the initial years of primary education. These groupings were to be known as Early Education Classes (E.E.C.'s) a name parents gave to one of the first classes which began at a school in the far north of the State. An important difference between the Class

IV school approach and the regular centre-based approach was that in the former the pre-school component was to be wholly under the educational and administrative control of the school principal.

The project was initiated in 1976 after a detailed study of Class IV schools throughout the State. The numbers of schools involved in the years since introduction of the plan are presented in Table 4.

(Insert Table 4 about here)

In moving towards the adoption of the E.E.C. approach, a number of considerations were taken into account. First, that the functions of the E.E.C. should be no different from those of the centre-based pre-schools, although obvious differences in educational programs were to be expected. Second, that if the E.E.C. was to be effective it would be essential to secure the support of both school personnel and the community served by the school prior to initiating any class. Third, that schools would need to be provided with the necessary resources in terms of physical facilities, materials and personnel to enable them to function efficiently. Fourth, that it would be essential to provide schools with adequate support in terms of in-service education opportunities and access to advisory services. Fifth, that given both resource and support, schools should also be given the freedom to evolve their educational program within the frameworks of the pre-school and the primary systems. Sixth, that close evaluative monitoring would be an essential component of the approach.

It should also be noted that as with the centre-based approach to pre-school provision, the E.E.C. concept was quite deliberately kept very flexible. Keeping open possible future lines of development remained an important con-

sideration. However, more important in this project was the need to explore the dimensions of community, pre-school and school interaction. It was recognized from the outset that the project could fail in a number of ways. First, the pre-school element could lose its essential individual-centered character. Second, the primary school component could fail to meet parent and teacher expectations with regard to learning in traditional, basic areas. Third, the clash between pre-school and primary value systems (and they were recognized as having a number of quite different orientation) could undermine the project.

However, it was also recognized that positive gains could be achieved through a wholly integrated approach. First, successful integration of the two value systems, pre-school and primary, could result in an upward influence being exercised upon primary school practices by the pre-school. Second, an integration of pre-school and the initial primary grades could result in greater flexibility with regard to accommodating individual differences among children. Third, if parents became extensively involved in the school through their pre-school child, this pattern might continue through other levels in the school. Finally, upwardly mobile principals in Class IV schools would generally be transferred to larger schools (which would have pre-school units associated with them), where their direct involvement in pre-school education and enhanced understanding of pre-school children would be an asset. This last consideration was judged significant because of its system-wide implications, for it was from the ranks of principals that senior leadership positions within the Department of Education were generally filled. Thus, the potential impact of the infusion effect was seen as having implications well beyond the Class IV schools. In order to ensure optimum facilitating conditions, emphasis was placed on providing resources and support. Without these it was believed that initiative could become either bogged down or misdirected, and motivation thereby dampened.

One further point should be noted. In 1973, when considering the matter of pre-service teacher education, it was necessary to provide advice to training institutions on the projected number of teachers required and the general nature of the training desired. With regard to the latter, institutions were encouraged to opt for pre-service programs which combined pre-school and primary school training, with an emphasis upon the early childhood period of 4-8 years of age. Thus, teachers available for appointment to Class IV schools generally had a pre-service background in both pre-school and primary teaching.

Detailed analyses of Class IV schools provided considerable information which permitted planning targets and cost projections to be established:

Year 1 (first year of primary schooling) classes ranged from one to 21 children with an average class size of 8.75;

Year 1 classes of 8 or fewer children occurred in just over half the schools;

Year 1 classes of 16 or fewer children occurred in more than 90 percent of Class IV schools.

These data enabled certain estimates to be made concerning staffing needs. Using the existing primary school staffing scale, it was projected that some 70 additional teachers would be required to implement the whole project. (All other teachers deployed in such classes would require inservice training of various kinds.) This estimate was based on the assumption that pre-school attendance would remain sessional, and each pupil would therefore represent half a full-

time equivalent. Further, from detailed information concerning existing school facilities, it was determined that three separate types of accommodation needs would have to be met:

- provision of a self contained classroom facility which would serve pre-school and any other students that the school included in the E.E.C.;
- creation of additional space by extending a section of the existing school;
- remodelling of an internal section of the school to provide storage space or other such feature.

Granted the provision of resources and support, each school faced a difficult management problem in determining how the E.E.C. should be organized. No guidelines for this work existed within the Queensland, or indeed elsewhere in Australia. Differences in sizes of Class IV schools meant there were wide variations in how the children were grouped. Teachers were responsible for children in one-, two-, three- or even four-year levels of the school. Therefore, it was decided that when an E.E.C. was established at a school, the group should consist of a maximum of 25 children with no more than preschool and two other year levels. It was also decided that a full-time teacher aide would be appointed to the group and that a strong emphasis would be give to voluntary parent involvement in classrooms.

A further problem faced by schools was to decide on the pattern of attendance that most suited their situation. While half-day sessional attendance was possible in some areas, it was not practical in others. Various options existed.

The children could attend either each morning or each afternoon or they could attend for a full day for no more than five full days per fortnight. In the latter case children might travel on the school bus. This system was tested extensively in 1973 at regular preschools, and results indicated that a maximum one-way trip of 45 minutes every other day produced no ill-effect for most 4-year-old children. However, each pre-schooler on a bus had to be under the guardianship of an older child. Most E.E.C.'s adopted the alternate day pattern, one important reason being that it gave the teacher time alone with the older children. The most difficult problem, however, was in establishing the educational program. In this regard schools were invited to develop their own approaches within the frameworks of the pre-school and the primary systems. Resources of various kinds were developed to assist schools in this effort, but the final decision was vested in the school with regard to structuring experiences and content, determining timetables and managing the program.

At the end of the first year of the project an informal evaluation was requested of school principals. No uniform patterning of an educational program was sought, nor did one emerge. Rather each school worked out its own way for achieving a balance in the curriculum experiences provided. However, all principals reported that while the work of determining the program was demanding and exacting it was nevertheless professionally challenging. One principal wrote:

"The pre-school children enrolled at this school have shown great development in social skills, language skills, pre-mathematical skills and fine and gross motor skills. They are better prepared to enter Grade (Year)1 than any other group of children I have seen, they are independent and self-assured,

and working forward eagerly to next's schooling. I have been excited by the development that has occurred in the children who have taken part in this pilot program and I commend the program to every Class IV Principal."

(Cited by Talnton, 1977).

Of course, not all principals were equally excited. Some were concerned that the pre-school children might become bored by the Year 1 program. Others, felt that the presence of pre-school children in the school added to their administrative burden. Also, a number of principals noted that early in the year parents expressed concern that Year 1 children in the E.E.C. would be held back by the presence of pre-school children and the demands they made upon the teacher's time. However, by the end of 1976 all principals involved in the initial year of the project were positive in their support.

E.E.C. Research Project

On the basis of the first year of the project and the informal evaluation, a formal research project was begun in 1977 and 1978. This study sought to probe the processes and interactions involved in the operation of E.E.C's. It also examined perceptions concerning the E.E.C's. (Turner and Miles, 1979).

The design of the probe was multi-dimensional. All 56 E.E.C's operating in 1977 were included, together with two control groups. The two controls consisted of equal numbers of regular pre-schools and Class IV School without an E.E.C. In the Class IV schools both teachers and principals participated. Only teachers in pre-schools participated. In addition, the views of teachers in the next higher class to the E.E.C., that is the class receiving children from the E.E.C., were also obtained in both 1977 and 1978.

The major areas examined were the work program, educational aims, support services, teacher aides and parent volunteers, and administration.

The main difference in organization patterns between schools with and those without an E.E.C. was in the grouping of the lower end of the school. In schools with an E.E.C., the groupings were generally pre-School and Year 1, with the next class consisting of Years 2 and 3. In the other schools, Years 1, 2 and 3 generally constituted the first class. Differences were also noted between teachers in the E.E.C.'s and those in the first class of other schools. The E.E.C. teachers were younger, reflected different pre-service training backgrounds, and were generally similar to teachers in pre-schools. The principals at the two types of schools did not differ significantly from each other: they averaged 12 years in office and previously had been staff teachers for a number of years, generally at the middle and upper primary school levels.

In the area of educational programs the E.E.C. teachers and preschool teachers were very similar, and both were different from teachers in non-E.E.C. schools. E.E.C. and preschool teachers highlighted integration of learning, use of interest centres, and tolerance of greater movement within the room; they also evidenced substantial differences in the use of art and music activities as compared to teachers in non-E.E.C. schools.

The processes of acquiring and using information were also more heavily stressed by pre-school and E.E.C. teachers than primary teachers. The latter gave much stronger emphasis to information acquisition. While all teachers exhibited evidence of considerable planning, a major difference was noted between the E.E.C.'s and other Class IV schools. In the former, the principal was involved to a much greater extent in working with the E.E.C. teacher on planning. Keeping individual files on children's progress, planning integration in various learning areas and more co-operative evaluation were all in evidence.

thus, although it would be true to say that by the end of 1978 no distinctive new educational approach had emerged in the E.E.C.'s, there were clear signs of new processes coming into play which had potential for vitalizing schools.

It appeared that the advent of an E.E.C. changed the education program for primary children rather than for pre-school children.

In the area of aims there was little difference between teachers in the three settings or between principals. However, where differences occurred these were at the Year 1 level. In particular, the degree of emphasis on social and emotional development and on aesthetic skills in the areas of art and music was higher among E.E.C. teachers than among primary teachers. One outstanding difference was in the area of parental involvement, which was strongly emphasized by preschool and E.E.C. teachers but not by other teachers.

Principals of schools with an E.E.C. program and E.E.C. teachers were strongly supportive of the project. The majority of teachers in the next class were also supportive. However, both E.E.C. teachers and their principals raised a number of concerns about their own lack of knowledge. For principals, this lack was in the pre-school area, while for teachers the need was for program information at the Year 1 and 2 levels of the primary school.

The matter of support services was probed both with regard to availability and appropriateness. In general, there was widespread satisfaction with the support given by pre-school advisory services as compared with support from primary advisory services. Further, differences in the usefulness of various departmental publications were also noted. For example, Links, a magazine put out by the pre-school division, was widely used and referred to, but certain other publications prepared to provide assistance in content areas in the primary school were almost unused.

Major differences were reflected between E.E.C. schools and other schools on the matter of parental involvement. Pre-schools and E.E.C.'s reported substantially higher levels of parental participation than other schools. Indeed, a feature was the extent to which parents were seen to play a vital role in working with children in the E.E.C. Differences in the use of teacher aides were also noted. In particular, aides in both pre-schools and E.E.C.'s worked more in a colleague relationship with the teacher than in the other schools.

In the area of administration most principals found problems. Many of these stemmed from the slowness in refurbishing schools and installing new facilities. Most other problems were the "teething problems" inevitably associated with melding new activities or responsibilities onto existing ones.

Overall the evidence obtained from the review was positive but indicated areas in which greater effort was needed. This was particularly the case in the provision of more extensive inservice education for principals and E.E.C. teachers. Offsetting this, however, was evidence that self-motivated learning appeared to be a consequence of installing an E.E.C. at a school. Further, changes occurred with the advent of an E.E.C. in terms of the schools organization, changes in the Year 1 and 2 program, and the extent of community participation in the school.

PRE-SCHOOL SYSTEM INSTALLATION

The foregoing description provides background for understanding the three-pronged approach to the provision of pre-school education facilities and opportunities in Queensland. On the basis of experience to date it is possible to derive a number of tentative principles that emerge from this exercise. Before detailing these it may be useful to summarize certain major assumptions underlying the development of pre-school education.

Assumptions Underlying the System

The first assumption concerns the nature of preschool education. Elsewhere (Ashby, 1972, 1976 and 1979) I have argued that there are specific criteria which identify an educational program. These criteria revolve around the intentions and worth of the learning promoted and the state of the learner. Within the Queensland system it was proposed that pre-schools provide educative experiences at two levels: for children and for parents. Of course, each level has its own particular set of demands, however, the intent of each is to view learning within a continuum of experiences. For the child, the continuum revolves around the progressive shifts in the location of learning activities that occur over time, coupled with changes in relationships between the child and others, the number of other people encountered, and various developmental factors. For parents the continuum comprises the changing pattern of the relationship with the child and the forms of support required by the child over time. Any pre-school educational program must make serious efforts to operate at each of the two levels and ensure that each grows out of the earlier developmental phases and orientates towards succeeding phases.

A second assumption concerns the particulars of program content, style and process. The sensitivity of the individual teacher to local conditions and needs is an essential requirement in this regard. The educational program for children and families must be organized in relation to the people and the setting involved. For example, there must be avenues by which parents can have input into the program, and teachers must be equipped to both solicit and make use of this input. Considerable trust must be given to teachers to evolve and translate ideas into relevant educational experiences appropriate to the setting.

The third assumption is that the teacher must be invested with considerable autonomy by an organization (in the bureaucratic sense) to take initiative and be responsible for the educational welfare and well-being of the children and the families who make up the community of the pre-school. However, this particular assumption has a very considerable sting in its tail, as translation into action is reliant upon three critical factors: first, the resources provided to the teacher; second, the processes by which teachers are inducted into their role; third, the support services provided by the organization. If resources are inadequate, autonomy is constricted. If induction is inappropriate, autonomy is meaningless. If support is not available, autonomy falters.

A fourth assumption is that a pre-school system should be comprehensive in the access provided to a range of services. However, it is important to recognize that comprehensiveness does not mean providing every kind of service. While the Queensland system was charged with providing pre-school education, the Department of Education was given neither a mandate nor the statutory responsibility to provide activities such as child (day) care services (these were vested in another authority). But clearly it is not sensible to propose that preschools should exist within a vacuum, uncoordinated with other types of provisions. Articulation between agencies is essential. Further, any assumptions concerning the comprehensive nature of a particular service should be tempered by the need to avoid duplication or overlap with other services. Thus, the determination of priorities and the identification of those matters which a system will, and can, cater to are essential. Within the Queensland geographic context, a range of alternative delivery systems was required. There was no single model for pre-school education that was appropriate across the whole State.

A sixth assumption is that action cannot always await the availability of soundly based research. Judgments have to be made. Further, in 1973, there were virtually no policy-oriented data available on systems development in early childhood education relevant to the Queensland context. Therefore, it was assumed that all decisions and actions that were made had to be carefully analyzed in terms of their perceived long-term implications. In particular, it was assumed that the retention of flexibility, except in areas where this was not a consideration, was critical, and the blocking-off of future options was to be avoided. However, in view of the absence of an established data base it was assumed that appropriate structures would need to be established to provide necessary information and evaluative feed back. It was also assumed that the information sought should be formative, rather than summative, in character and be used to directly assist decision making processes.

A final assumption was that the maintenance of motivation among staff and the retention of quality was a major concern of the organization. There is a profound difference between a growing, developing organization and one that has become relatively static in terms of growth. Excitement is not a state that can be successfully maintained over long periods of time. Yet retaining enthusiasm, interest and innovation is essential in any educational endeavour. Many factors may inhibit the capacity of an organization to maintain quality. The most significant of these factors are loss of personal identity due to increases in the numbers of people involved, and loss of a sense of clear direction or purpose by the organization. While early childhood educators are well known for their dedication, it was assumed that at some point the character of the system would undergo change and that this would require careful management. Specifically, it was assumed that although it might be possible to contrive ways of maintaining a high level of enthusiasm, as in management by crisis, these

would be unsatisfactory over a long period and less spectacular mechanisms would be more productive.

Some Principles Derived from the Queensland Experience

It is difficult to judge the extent to which principles emerge from the Queensland experience or indeed to determine whether these principles might be relevant elsewhere. This is true in part because of the context within which the pre-school system developed and in part because such matters involve judgment. Naturally, it is easy to point to various planning issues such as identification of target groups, definition of the services to be provided, and similar matters, for these issues are well recognized. For that reason, it would seem more profitable to elucidate some tentative ideas not so readily apparent. However, it must be stressed that in attempting to identify any principles, tentative or otherwise, there is a subtle but important shift, from the role of describer to that of judge, with all the inherent dangers that implies.

Principle 1. Pre-school education is a blend of functions and processes rather than a body of knowledge. This is not to say that knowledge is unimportant, but rather that knowledge is useful only in so far as it is relevant to developmental and social needs and to community and professional expectations. Both ends and means are variables in pre-school education which may be adjusted in responding to needs and expectations. The activity of responding is itself the application of processes to some particular situation. The processes selected are interpreted against an understanding of the functions to be served by the pre-school. Thus, it is of critical importance that the functions to be served by pre-school education be clearly defined with responsibilities clearly assigned.

In particular, pre-school education should remain primarily educational in its intent.

This view has important implications for the organization of pre-school education. Flexibility to respond to changing circumstances is an outcome of organization. The closing off of options in relation to modes of service delivery and the types of services delivered is a constraint imposed by the structure of an organization. The major effects of structure are reflected in the orientations and commitments of the people involved in organization. In the final analysis a flexible, responsive organization, as opposed to one that is integumented, depends heavily upon the judgment displayed by the teachers who work in daily contact with children, parents and other community agents. Unless teachers are able to grasp the responsibilities that are vested in them and consciously respond to shifting needs and expectations of individuals and communities, the system becomes closed. Therefore, administration involves trust and, to that extent, risk taking.

In administrative theory "flat organizational structures are generally believed better able to cope with variation of both ends and means than conventional bureaucratic structures. However, "flat" structures are very demanding in terms of the access that they permit among all members of the organization. Expertise is a criterion of leadership rather than status. Thus, the most senior members of the organization must possess recognized expertise and must interact extensively with all other personnel. At the same time, leadership cannot be conceived as the prerogative of those in positions of senior responsibility. Rather, efforts must be made to nurture professional leadership and professional responsibility in each member of the organization. Thus, attention must be paid to the forms, style and content of communication and above all the avoidance of a "them" versus "us" mentality.

Principle 2. The quality of education offered by pre-school services is a reflection of the quality of support provided to those who deliver the services. While at first sight this statement may appear a truism it is no less important because of that. Support takes many forms, from aiding an inexperienced teacher to adjust in a strange new situation, to challenging the experienced, successful teacher to engage in increasingly more complex and sophisticated tasks. Further, support must be both appropriate to the individual teacher and readily available when required.

A comprehensive network of support services includes specialists of many kinds. However, support services must focus on one central task: assisting the individual teacher. Support must never be at the expense of the teacher, nor must the teacher be threatened or overwhelmed by it. The basic element in any teaching team is the person who works directly with children and parents, therefore the object of support is to enhance the competency of the individual teacher while ensuring that appropriate provision is made for the individual child and family.

In addition to support persons, two other forms of assistance must be provided to teachers. First, they must be recognized as professionals in their own right. The designation of professional autonomy carries with it responsibilities which must be recognized and nurtured by the organization. Second, the teacher must have sufficient resources to permit programmatic choice to be exercised. Professional autonomy is an empty concept if the teacher lacks even the most minimal resources to execute a program. Of course, it is possible to over-provide with resources which may then be unused. Therefore, teachers must be given choice in selecting the resources they want and encouragement to establish their own priorities, in consultation with the parents and other colleagues who constitute the pre-school community. In a similar vein, in the

programatic area, it is possible to overwhelm the teacher through the constraints of a too prescriptive program. While most teachers claim that they want a degree of prescription, they soon resent the impotency that may follow if they cannot make choices and demonstrate individuality within the program. Thus, care must be taken not to provide too little or too much support. Similarly, care must be taken to ensure that what support given is perceived by the teacher as being helpful.

Principle 3. The pre-school is a transitional educational setting which mediates between other powerful social institutions. Major examples of these other institutions are the home and the school. The effect upon the pre-school of occupying a mediating position is that its program, Janus-like, must look in two directions: into the home and into the school. A number of implications follow. First, it is not useful to regard the pre-school as a place apart from other educative and socializing institutions within society. The pre-school can only operate with a degree of success when it attempts to bridge gaps between the various objectives sought by such institutions. Second, it is not desirable or profitable to regard the child in the pre-school apart from a continuum of development and experience. Too often programs and curricula appear to have been premised on an "as if" basis: as if the pre-school can educate in ways totally unrelated to the ways homes, communities, or schools educate. Third, the processes employed within the pre-school are the means by which bridges are established between the institutions that surround it. Fourth, the content of the processes employed must draw heavily upon the local environment. That is, the content must reflect local realities rather than those prescribed or determined remote from the place where they will be implemented. This is not to suggest that such determinations cannot be made but rather that they may

suffer from a lack of relevance. Fifth, that differences between various types of programs with regard to such factors as aims, intent and strategies, are less significant than the interactions between people in the programs. It is the interactions and the sensitivity of the individuals involved that determine what is learned in the pre-school.

The above implications are not definitive. However, they highlight something about the function of pre-school education. Primarily, it is important for the pre-school to be seen as leading towards the school, if not drawing away from the home. The subject matter of the pre-school is to be found not only through careful observation of children of pre-school age, but of children in homes, in schools, and in the community.

Principle 4. On-going formative evaluations which both monitor and change processes involved in pre-school programs, are a necessary condition for systematic development. However, this mechanism does not focus only on observations of children's development. Indeed, it may well be that such observations are of lesser importance than observations of what teachers, aides and parents do in the program. This is not to suggest that assessment of a child's progress is unimportant. Rather, the suggestion is that such observations may suffer from a circularity that fails to come to grips with the source of change. The child may respond, or not respond, to the environment created by adults in the pre-school setting, but the setting itself may often be ignored as a serious object for study.

Evaluation of the kind that is being advanced here depends very heavily upon the professional competence and maturity of the teacher. The organizational structure in which the pre-school operates must elicit and value evaluative input. However, it must be recognized that change is the outcome of

evaluation and that the implementation of such change should not be unduly delayed. It must be accepted that change of the type being referred to leads to diversity and this must be accepted as both inevitable and valuable. The involvement of teachers and aides as the evaluators of what is provided, how and to what effect, is essential in order to promote professional growth and maintain the health of a program.

The four principles that have been identified can be put together into a tentative theoretical model which describes an approach to the planning of pre-school education services. This proposed model can be referenced to classical planning models which are cyclical in operation. Typically, these models propose a sequence of events which follow a pattern: establish goals; identify resources; consider alternative options; select strategy; implement strategy; evaluate outcomes; revise goals (and so back through the cycle).

Classical approaches are essentially "ends-means" orientated. However, when education is provided in a wide range of settings both ends and means have to be adjusted to match local needs and conditions. Further, to hold that there are alternative methods by which some particular goal might be achieved is also misleading. The methods by which goals are achieved have different impacts upon the outcomes achieved. Therefore, it would appear better to start from the premise that outcomes will vary from place to place or indeed, in the case of education, from individual to individual. Such a starting place can be provided by a description of functions to be served rather than of aims. Functions vary from aims in that they describe a broad class of events by type of provision, rather than by some objective to be achieved. Statements of functions indicate direction without specifying what aims and methods ought to be applied in meeting the function: these are determined by the people on the spot.

Thus, responsibility for determining the educational program and its mode of operation rest with the individual teacher. This requires a high level of professional competence on the part of teachers. However, competence requires room to be developed. Clearly success contributes to increasing competence, but so too does the exercise of responsibility and the capacity to make mistakes, providing there is some learning as a result of mistakes. Therefore, if teachers are to accept responsibility they must be accorded a measure of autonomy and provided with support networks which sustain this.

Not all teachers operate at any one time at the same level of competence. Thus, support systems must be flexible enough to accomodate differing levels of expertise. Providing personal satisfactions and opportunities for enhancement for each individual is a difficult task. It cannot be orchestrated on the grand scale. Rather, support must take various forms for different individuals. For some, involvement in projects of increasing sophistication is essential. For others, the opportunity to go through processes, tried by others but found wanting, is an important step in personal and professional growth.

It is essential that the basic resources also be provided. Unsatisfactory physical conditions, the absence of equipment and materials are dissatisfiers which can seriously interfere with the effective implementation of a program. However, it must be recognized that the elimination of a dissatisfying condition will not by itself lead to satisfaction and commitment to the program. Unless there are rewards that are experienced by the teacher personally, it is unlikely that manipulation of extrinsic conditions will heighten professionalism.

It will be clear that much is made in this sketch of the centrality of the teacher to the processes of pre-school education. Indeed, it may appear that too much emphasis is given to the professional component in preschool education. Perhaps. But it should be remembered that belief in the development of pre-school education in Queensland was that flexibility in organizational structure,

responsiveness to changing patterns of need, and sensitivity to particular local circumstances were educationally essential in the creation of a system. The cornerstone of the system is people, hence, the thrust of this paper has been directed to highlighting those steps by which an attempt has been made to develop a caring, involved and committed teaching staff.

Over the past two decades there has been a tremendous amount of activity in pre-school and early childhood education. A great proportion of that activity has been directed towards the development of appropriate curricula. Much less attention has been given to implementation of programs at the system level or at the local school or pre-school level. Yet it remains a fundamental truth that the worth of a program is manifest by the benefits it confers upon those who participate. Evaluating changes in status over a period of time, whether terms of I.Q. or any other measure, cannot tell the whole story. The ways individual lives have been affected by their experiences must be taken into consideration. The outcomes of participation in pre-school education are difficult to assess and can seldom be known with accuracy. However, difficulties of measurement do not make more elusive outcomes any less real.

If pre-school education is to be effective it must exert its influence at many levels: upon children, parents, teachers in primary schools, other community agents and upon the teachers who work in the pre-school. What is required is the application of knowledge from many disciplines to pre-school education and the careful analysis of the implications of such knowledge for organizational structures and programs. Without recognition of this fact, pre-school education ceases to be a process by which change is effected and becomes instead an isolated educational artifact. Such a result would be a sad commentary on the potential of preschool education as a vitalizing force within education and the community.

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APPENDIX

Reports of Pre-School Correspondence Program Research Project*

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| Ashby, G., McGaw, B., Grant, J. | <u>The Pre-School Correspondence Program: Background. Report No. 1 (1975) (ED 129 431)</u> |
| Ashby, G., McGaw, B., Perry, R., Grant, J. | <u>The Pre-School Correspondence Program: An Overview. Report No. 2 (1975, Revised 1978)</u> |
| McGaw, B., Ashby, G., Perry, R. | <u>Interactions in the Pre-School Correspondence Program: Report No. 3 (1975) (ED 125 765)</u> |
| McGaw, B., Ashby, G., Grant, J. | <u>Parent's Perception of the Pre-School Correspondence Program. Report No. 4 (1975) (ED 125 764)</u> |
| Ashby, G., Boorsboom, E., Rosser, S. | <u>SPAN Playgroups for Geographical Isolated Pre-School Children: Theoretical Basis and Strategies. Report No. 5 (1976) (ED 162 733)</u> |
| Grant, J., Ashby, G., Clemesha, B. | <u>Teacher's Perceptions of the Pre-School Correspondence Program. Report No. 6 (1978) (ED 151 101)</u> |
| Grant, J., Ashby, G., Clemesha, B. | <u>Analysis of the Teaching Styles of a Sample of Parents in the Pre-School Correspondence Program. Part 1: Parent Interviews. Report No. 7 (1978). (ED 156 322)</u> |
| Ashby, G., Rigby, A., Grant, J. | <u>Evaluation of the SPAN Parent Workshop and the Operation of SPAN Groups. Report No. 8 (1979)</u> |

* Published by Research Branch, Division of Planning and Services, Department of Education, Brisbane. Most reports are available through the ERIC system of the U.S. National Institute of Education, under the ED numbers indicated.

Table 1Classification of Primary Schools in Queensland

Classification	Enrolment
Class I	601 +
Class II	301 - 600
Class III	101 - 300
Class IV	36 - 100
Class V	21 - 35
Class VI	20

Table 2 Pre-School Division in Queensland, 1972-1979

	No. Centres	No. Units	Enrolments	Teaching Staff
1972	-	-	-	21 (2)
1973	18	28	1,000	85 (2)
1974	78	103	4,668	175 (2) (3)
1975	148	220	9,355	287 (2)
1976	231	341	15,839	508 (2) (4)
1977	289	421	19,383	584
1978	329	493	22,490	653
1979	338	509	24,600	729

- Notes: (1) Enrolments are effective as at National Census date of 1 August each year.
- (2) Includes primary and high school teachers undertaking pre-school training programs
- (3) From 1974 includes teachers on Pre-School Correspondence Program.
- (4) From 1976 includes teachers deployed in Class IV School Project.

Table 3 Pre-School Correspondence Program in Queensland

	Enrolments (1)	Teachers	Other Staff
1974	280	10	4
1975	540	21	7
1976	825	38	11
1977	882	33	14
1978	852	38	14
1979	835 (2)	37	16

Note: (1) Enrolments effective as at National Census date of 1 August each year.

(2) Enrolment at opening school year, January 1979.

Table 4

Class IV School Project: Number of Early Education
Centres in Queensland

1976	19
1977	56
1978	79
1979	93

Figure 1.

AUSTRALIA: STATES, CAPITALS
AND MAJOR TOWNS
IN QUEENSLAND

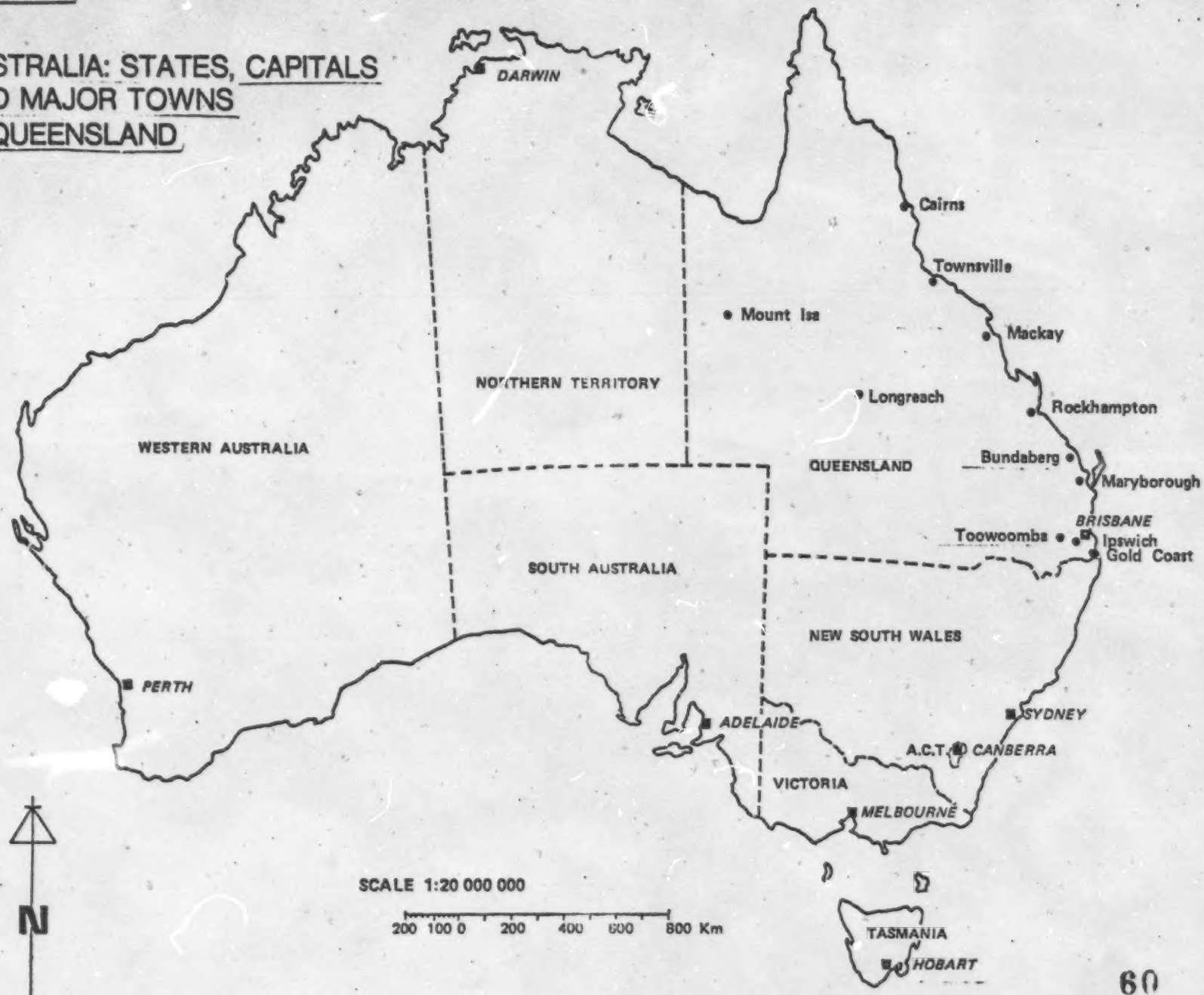


Figure 2.

QUEENSLAND: POPULATION DISTRIBUTION AND EDUCATION REGIONS

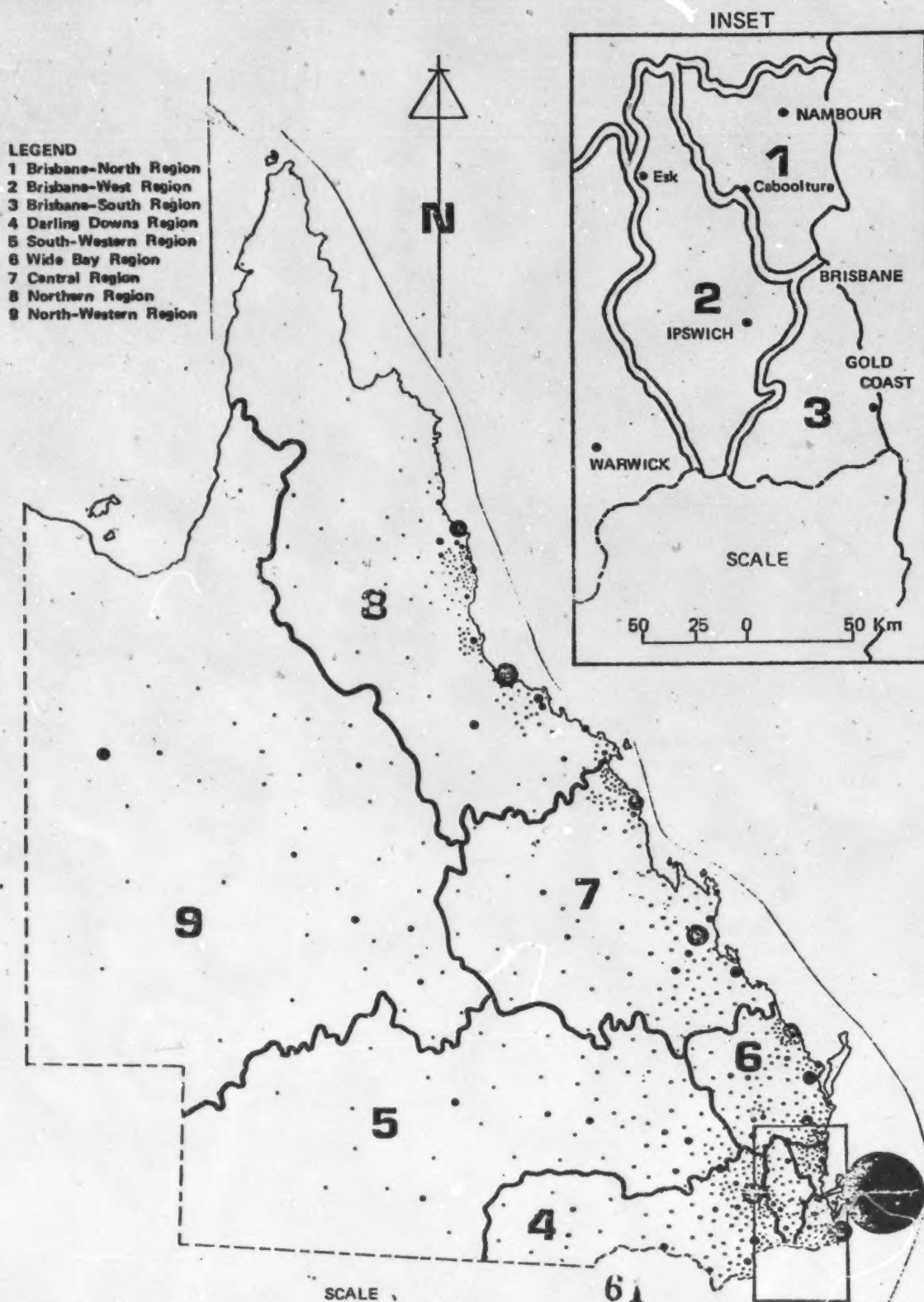
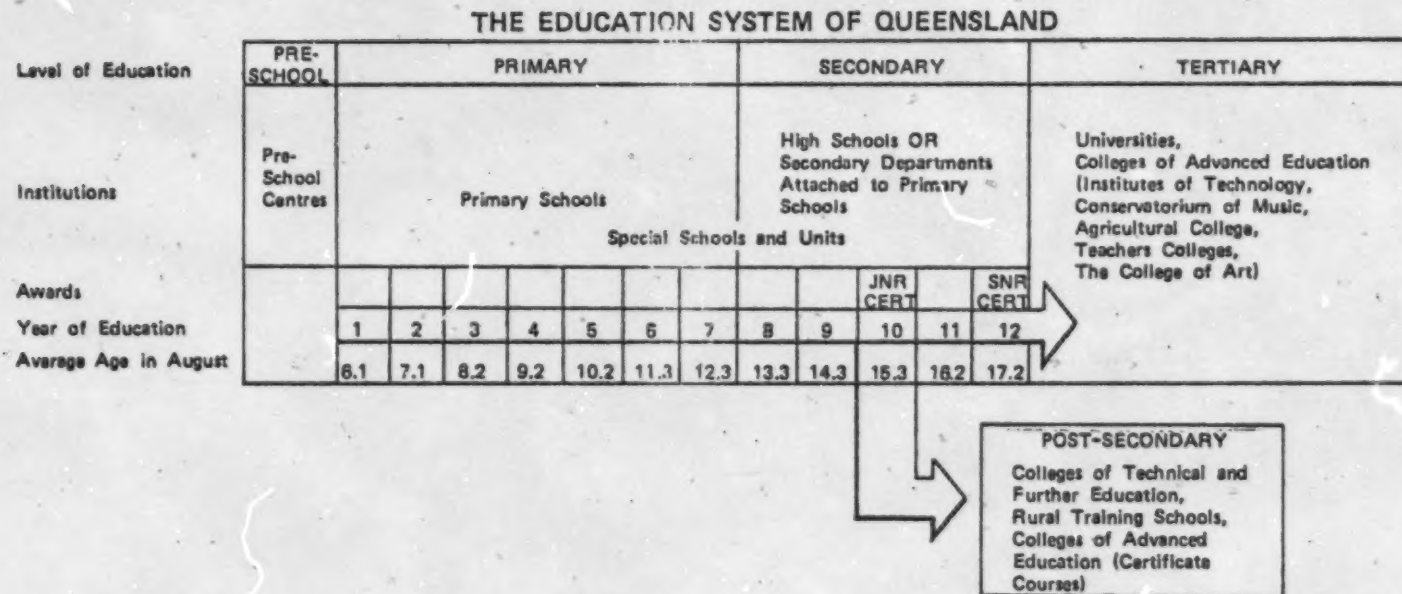


Figure 3



2 August 1979

Figure 4 Pre-School Correspondence Program - Segment Themes and Materials

Program Title: THE CHILD AND HIS WORLD

<u>Segment Themes</u>	<u>Segment Components</u>
1. Self Identification	<u>Segment News:</u> Overview and highlights of content
2. Daily Living	<u>Segment Booklet:</u> Treatment of theme, concepts, activities and highlights
3. Environment	<u>Program Workbook:</u> Outline of activities that can be completed and returned to unit-based teacher
4. Perception	<u>Story Booklets:</u> Development of major concepts of the Segment
5. Classification	<u>Cassette Tape:</u> Stories, music, movement related to Segment
6. Relationships	<u>Teacher Information Sheet:</u> Review of segment returned to unit-based teacher.
7. Independence and Responsibility	<u>Contact:</u> Parent information newsletter.
8. Personal Relationships	